



**Region One
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901**

**Decision Notice
and
Finding of No Significant Impact
for West Shore State Park
Improvement Project**

September 29, 2009

Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to install electrical pedestals and electrical infrastructure at 11 of the existing 32 campsites at West Shore State Park in Lake County (T25N, R20W, Section 4). Electrical pedestal installation would occur at 11 campsites in Loop B. Loop A campsites would not be affected. Additionally, an existing water line near Campsite 8 in Loop B would be extended to provide a more accessible water hydrant for campsites located at the end of the loop.

Public Process

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an environmental assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on July 27, 2009. The public comment period extended through August 28, 2009.

The public was notified in the following manners to comment on the draft EA, the proposed action, and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: the Helena Independent Record, the Daily Inter Lake, and the Lake County Leader;
- One statewide press release;
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web site: <http://fwp.mt.gov>; and
- 30-day public comment period following publication of second legal notice.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope, having few minor impacts.

Summary of Public Comment

- Twenty-three people submitted comments during the 30-day comment period. Twelve comments expressed support for the project. The most frequently mentioned positive outcomes of the installation of electrical service at a limited number of sites included: support for local economy through increased tourism, health benefits from the ability to run medical equipment and control internal RV temperatures, lessening of generator noise, and overall camping convenience.
- Eight comments opposed the proposal. Common themes mentioned were: competition with private campgrounds, cost to taxpayers and wastefulness in current economic times, and the belief that the use or presence of electrical pedestals at campsites does not present a true camping experience.
- Three comments expressed a desire that shower facilities be constructed prior to installing electrical pedestals.
- No comments regarding the water line extension were received.

Comment Summary Supportive of the Proposed Project (12 total):

Excerpts from comment cards received at West Shore State Park:

"Electric hookups at campsites are becoming much more common. I would use that amenity if available. On a 13-state tour, many state campgrounds had electric - some at all sites."

"I think electric would be great for those who would use it. Cut down on generator noise."

"Power at some sites would be nice option. It would be nice for visitors with health issues also."

"Beautiful campground - enjoyed our stay. Maintained very well. We would like to see hookups in various sites. A section for recyclables would be an asset as well!"

"Electric would be nice and would lessen generator noise in the campground."

"That would be a great thing. Thanks for asking."

"This change would be an improvement worth having as long as rate could remain affordable to the average camper and campers were not allowed to stay too long."

FWP Response: So noted for above supportive comments. A charge of \$5 for electricity will be added to the standard camp fee. Length of stay is limited to 14 days in any 30-day period. Recycling stations are a good idea that is being evaluated for potential implementation next season.

E-mails Received:

RE: West Shore State Park Campground Improvement Project

“The Flathead Convention & Visitor Bureau (FCVB) is a non-profit tourism organization located Kalispell, Montana. It is our goal to promote visitation to the Flathead Valley, including Glacier National Park, while preserving its history, nature and beauty.

“The FCVB supports West Shore State Park Campground Improvement Project as follows:

“Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to install 11 campsite electrical pedestals within campground Loop B at West Shore State Park. This would be 11 of the 32 campsites or 34% of the sites available. Additionally, the proposed project would include electrical infrastructure improvements, such as a new transformer box and electrical panel to support the new pedestals. In conjunction with the installation of the electrical conduits, FWP proposes to extend the existing waterline from near Campsite 8 in Loop B to the end of the campground loop by the vault latrine. Approximately 200’ of new piping is anticipated.

“Camping is becoming more and more popular with visitors to the Flathead Valley. Today’s campers are looking for more conveniences and the addition of new electrical pedestals will fill this need.

“We applaud the efforts of the State Park to be proactive to the needs and wants of campers and we encourage your financial support of this project.”

“I am a Montana resident, active RVer and Tourism Consultant for RVIA. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of having electricity for RV sites for RVers on business, RVers who are full timers, RVers that need to stay connected with families and aging parents. State Parks not only get revenue from the RVer, but the surrounding areas receive the benefit of RV revenue as well. An average RVer spent \$94.00 per day according to Good Sams Club. This year in Montana it was actually the RVer that brought in Tourism dollars when other traditional travelers were not visiting the state. Too many times states overlook the value of dollars generated by the RVer. I would be more than happy to discuss this with you personally or you can see the impact yourself on my website under newsletters. Thank you for your consideration.”

“Electrical Outlets sound good to me. I assume B Loop is the upper loop. We are landowners in Goose Bay. Thanks for the notification.”

“Personally I think a few hook-ups are a good thing, since generators really disturb the peace!”

“I fully support electrical additions to the campsites. We are at retirement age and have medical issues that require a cpap machine and also air condition to be tolerable in the summer. There are enough wilderness camping areas for those who wish that experience. I did that years ago and I am ready to relax more than explore. I have paid my share of taxes the last 40 years in addition to hunting, fishing and rec land use fees and would welcome some of the campgrounds to have power. Thanks for listening.”

FWP Response: So noted for above supportive comments

Comments in Opposition to the Proposed Project (8 total):

Excerpts from comment cards received at West Shore State Park:

“We love the park just the way it is, a true treasure. Loop B is an amazing gem that provides tranquil space (without the big rigs taking away from the beauty). Please do not add electrical.”

FWP Response: So noted.

“No electricity. We have a 5th wheel trailer and sometimes electricity would be handy, but people that want more conveniences can go to a private campground with all the bells and whistles. This campground is for a true camping experience.”

FWP Response: A camping experience is a personal value judgment. Everyone’s experience will be different based on their expectations and preferences. For those that prefer electricity, using it will also be a true camping experience.

“Don’t electrify. Just blacktop & make some spaces larger. And no reservation system.”

FWP Response: So noted regarding electricity. As to paving & site expansion, they are not part of this proposal.

“First, this is a great park like it is. Beautiful and large sites. Nice people to meet. A great price. Don’t make it like an RV park and raise the cost. Maybe consider showers, grills at day use. Most of us don’t need electric. We are here to camp and enjoy quiet and nature.”

FWP Response: Most private campgrounds provide full hookups, which include water and sewer in addition to electricity. This proposal only includes electricity, which falls short of the full range of amenities typically offered at private RV campgrounds. Comments received indicate that over 50% would support installation of electrical pedestals. This proposal would also eliminate the need to use generators at selected sites, thereby contributing to a quiet camp. Showers, etc., are not a part of this proposal.

E-mails Received

"I am writing to oppose any proposal to add electrical outlets for campers at the MT West Shore State Park Campground.

"There are plenty of places that 'campers' who drive around in RVs and want electricity to run their air-conditioners and Direct TVs and strings of holiday lights can spend the night.

"Camping is supposed to be about getting back to nature. Being surrounded by people who can't bear to be away from every form of creature comfort destroys this concept, and they are not to be encouraged in our state parks. I camp in state parks and avoid private RV parks specifically for this reason. People in RVs may think that what they're doing is camping, but it's not, and people with my perspective rely on state parks without electrical service to avoid all the negatives RVs bring with.

"This also a terrible idea from an economic standpoint. Since there's no mention of metering the use of electricity, the citizens of MT will wind up essentially subsidizing its use. How ironic that would be, paying RV users to come to natural settings so they can destroy the atmosphere of natural peace and quiet.

"Moreover, providing this subsidized electricity will impact private businesses that are designed to serve this segment of 'campers' and put the state government in direct competition with them. That's not something our government should be doing.

"This was a terrible idea when it was first proposed over a year ago and it remains a terrible idea now. Please do not provide electrical hookups in this park."

"I am opposed to putting in electrical hookups as noted. In these fiscal times, and seeing as what is happening to other State Park Systems Financial conditions, I would think that FWP would have realized the long term financial effects of more development, as long term maintenance costs will rise. No where did I see this addressed, although it is required to address these effects on the "Park System as a whole," if I recall correctly. Also, has all maintenance been accomplished, so that there is no longer a backlog? I believe that is a requirement as well. And why do you want to cater mostly to RV's? And use more energy than would be otherwise, when policies should be going the other way?

"Does noone in FWP recall the 80's, when money was tight and taken away from Parks, so that the System was forced to make a large downsizing? Does FWP want those conditions to reoccur now? The future State fiscal outlook looks poor, but I don't see Parks acting that way. Will these types of action create a backlash? There's a lot of opposition to creating "RV Parks" in our State Park System by the owners of our State Parks. I believe you all should consider them, and not go down this road."

"I have long been an opponent of government competing with the private sector. Small campground businesses across Montana collect the bed tax, pay income and high real estate taxes to fund a government entity to be in direct competition with small business.

"The upgrading of state parks around Flathead Lake also had Governor Schweitzer involved a couple of years ago, and I agreed with him that there was no need to spend the money.

"The modern camper brings a generator and/or outside lighting when going to a park without facilities. There is no need to use taxpayer money to fund another project in this pristine location. Visitors want a more natural experience when camping in Montana at a state park, especially on the shores of Flathead Lake.

"The private sector should be the ones with all the bells and whistles in order to make the money to pay their taxes. Besides, a private campground gets twice the amount of revenue as the measly \$15/night at West Shore, which has gorgeous lakefront property with million dollar views. Perhaps the fees should be raised around Flathead Lake to be more in line with the private sector, too.

"I hope there will be a 'thumb's down' to this idea of electrical pedestals in Loop B of West Shore State Park. What next—water, sewer, swimming pools? Also, what does it mean when the EA states it 'would include electrical infrastructure improvements' in addition to the pedestals? Thanks for your time and consideration of my comments as a supporter of small businesses in the Flathead."

FWP Response to Nonsupportive E-mails and Letter: This project reflects the changing needs and values of state park visitors. Every recreational vehicle sold today has provision for electrical connections. Montana State Parks wants to attract campers that are desirous of camping in a state park setting. West Shore State Park has greatly increased camping opportunities in an effort to make the park a destination site. This includes providing a broad range of camping experiences from boat camping and walk-in campsites to potentially having some sites with electricity. FWP markets the park as a central location and onsite staff and informational brochures direct travelers to the many attractions in the vicinity in an effort to increase the number of days people stay in the area. This contributes to the local economy and helps small businesses. Although FWP may incur costs for maintenance due to the addition of electrical services, the fees generated from use of electricity are anticipated to offset this cost. The added benefits of park visitors spending dollars in the local economy will be an asset that contributes positively to Montana's economy as a whole.

Regarding competition with the private sector, most private campgrounds provide full hookups, which include water and sewer in addition to electrical. This proposal only includes electrical, which falls short of the full range of amenities typically offered at private RV campgrounds. Those desiring more amenities will still utilize private campgrounds.

Whether use of electricity at a campsite detracts from a natural or true camping experience is entirely subjective and, as demonstrated by the received responses, will vary from individual to individual.

At least 50 % of the camping units occupying Flathead Lake State Park campgrounds are comprised of RVs. Typically one finds tents and RVs at the same site. Those who camp in the shoulder seasons; i.e., May and September are predominantly RVers. Consequently, addressing the needs of RV campers is not an unreasonable approach. Knowing the market is a good business practice.

Electrical infrastructure refers to the conduit, wiring, transformer box, and electrical panel that support the pedestal installation.

Phone message received 8/19/09

“Strongly against. Would prefer B-loop as tents only.”

FWP Response: So noted. When possible, we attempt to accommodate both RVs and tents at our campsites. This provides more versatility for the limited number of sites and more flexibility in choices for campers.

Comments other than for support or opposition :

Excerpts from comment card received at West Shore State Park:

“Showers would be better than power. All could enjoy showers few could enjoy power.”

“Our preference would be to have shower facilities available that could benefit all campers rather than power in a few sites that would benefit only a few campers.”

“Showers would be very welcome and then power.”

FWP Response: So noted. However, showers are not a part of the proposal.

Decision

Based on the analysis in the environmental assessment, I find that the installation of electrical pedestals at eleven sites in Loop B, Alternative B, to be the preferred alternative. I have evaluated the EA and applicable laws, regulations, and policies and have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

In accordance with FWP policy, an appeal may be made by any person who has either commented in writing to the department on the proposed project, or who has registered or commented orally at a public meeting held by the department on the proposed project, or who can provide new evidence that would otherwise change the proposed plan. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this decision notice. The appeal must

describe the basis for the appeal, how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and how the department can provide relief. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620.

The final environmental assessment may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region One, Kalispell, Montana. Please direct requests and questions to Jerry Sawyer, Flathead Lake District Park Manager, (406) 751-4575 or e-mail to jsawyer@mt.gov



David Landstrom
Regional Parks Manager

September 29, 2009

Date